

Meeting Date: November 6, 2008

Agenda Item No. 16

Agenda Item: Pelican Management Plan (Action Item)

Approved by: _____

Prepared by: Rex Sallabanks

Background:

Department fisheries and wildlife staff are developing a 5-year Pelican Management Plan to help alleviate predation by pelicans on spawning Yellowstone cutthroat and other game fish populations in Southeast Idaho (Executive Summary attached).

Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues:

The *draft* Pelican Management Plan contains both non-lethal (hazing birds, physical deterrents) and lethal (shooting adults, oiling eggs) management actions intended to reduce pelican numbers at two breeding colonies in southern Idaho. Non-lethal methods could be implemented in 2009 following Commission approval of the plan. Because the American White Pelican is federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, however, authorization from the USFWS will be required before lethal take could occur.

Public Involvement Process:

None to date (the plan has been developed internally) but a 30-day public comment period is needed on the *draft* Pelican Management Plan prior to submission of the *final* plan for Commission approval (January meeting).

Staff Recommendation:

The *draft* Pelican Management Plan should be released for public comment for a 30-day period, from Nov 12 – Dec 12, 2008. Standard procedures for seeking public input include a press release announcing the availability of the plan for comment and posting the *draft* plan on the Department's website.

Justification:

Public comments should be incorporated into the *final* Pelican Management Plan prior to Commission approval of the *final* plan (January meeting). Once the *final* plan has been approved by the Commission, Department staff will seek necessary permits from the USFWS authorizing lethal action to control pelican numbers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Observed growth in nesting populations of American white pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) in southern Idaho has prompted a review by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to assess the potential significance of pelican impacts on game fish populations. In recent years, concerns have been raised by fishery management staff in southeast Idaho regarding pelicans preying on native cutthroat trout subspecies and hatchery trout in important recreational fisheries.

One primary area of concern for native Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii bouvieri*) is the Blackfoot Reservoir-Blackfoot River complex. Numbers of nesting pelicans on Blackfoot Reservoir islands have increased significantly since 2000. Associated with this rapid increase in pelican numbers has been documented predation by pelicans on spawning Yellowstone cutthroat trout in the Blackfoot River. Documented scarring rates on spawning fish trapped at a weir have been as high as 70% of observed fish. Additionally, estimated predation rates of pelicans on hatchery trout in some southeastern Idaho reservoirs approached 100% by weight of fish stocked.

Regional IDFG staff have attempted hazing actions to reduce impacts of pelicans on trout, but these efforts have had limited success. Lethal control (shooting adult birds foraging on the Blackfoot River), approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), also met with limited success. Because conflicts between birds and fish are suspected to continue or increase, the IDFG established a technical working group of regional experts charged with the following mission: *to develop guidelines to manage conflicts in Idaho between pelicans and fish populations that balance conservation and recreation interests for both.*

Key to implementing a successful management program to reduce pelican impacts on important game fish populations is garnering the support of and necessary permits from the USFWS. This document represents the IDFG proposed 5-year management plan (2009–2013) for pelicans in areas where current management conflicts exist.

The Pelican-Trout Technical Working Group (PTTWG) developed both statewide and regional pelican population objectives and management goals. The statewide population objective is *to maintain a 5-year average of 2,774 breeding birds in Idaho*; the statewide management goal is *to manage pelican-fish conflicts in Idaho while maintaining existing breeding colonies*. In southeast Idaho (IDFG Southeast Region), where bird-fish conflicts are greatest, the regional population objective is *to maintain a 5-year average of 1,674 breeding birds at Blackfoot Reservoir*. Management goals in this region are *to reduce numbers of breeding pelicans at Blackfoot to achieve the population objective by 2013, to reduce pelican predation on migrating Yellowstone cutthroat trout, and to reduce pelican predation on sport fish in high conflict areas.*

Fourteen management actions were considered by the PTTWG in order to meet these goals and objectives by 2013. A short-list of management actions are presented in detail in this document along with substantial supporting information on bird and fish ecology, previous control efforts outside of Idaho, and current information needs.